60 Selected Regional Information Society Projects

Innovative Actions Network for the Information Society+

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PREFACE

A central aspect of the IANIS+ work programme (2005 – 2007) has been a focus on analysis of, and learning from regional ICT projects. The regional members of the consortium agreed the selection of domains as the focus for the work of six thematic work groups: eBusiness, eGovernment, eLearning, eHealth, eInfrastructure and, lastly, Indicators & Benhcmarking. Understandably, most of the project case reports collected during the work programme fell into these domains.

Project case reports have been collected from a variety of practitioners and activists in the IANIS+ work programme. These have included the members of the thematic work groups (the regional experts), those who attended the Torino intensive course in October 2006 (the regional information society 'students'), the regional practitioners who carried out peer review visits to another region, and those who presented their projects at one of the IANIS+ annual conferences.

The analysis, evaluation of and selection of projects has been carried out by an independent expert hired by the IANIS+ Secretariat: Jane Tebbutt. Jane has followed closely the IANIS+ work programme from the beginning and has become attuned to its peculiarities, realities and difficulties. Not least amongst these has been the fact that writing up projects that have concluded or which are close to conclusion is not a high priority for those charged with undertaking this task. Moreover, researching, capturing and adequately describing such projects is something of an art form and not everyone is well qualified to do it. Nonetheless, by means of various forms of encouragement and cajolement, IANIS+ was able to gather some 140 project cases

In many cases, Jane worked with the case authors helping them to produce useful documentation and making good the deficiencies of first drafts. Jane has undertaken a separate thematic analysis of these projects based in part on the outputs of the thematic work groups that were each charged with producing a guide good practice for their domain based upon practical project experiences in the regions. As part of the agreed deliverables, we were also required to select and publish 60 of the project case reports which we do here.

The projects have been selected by Jane based on her reading and knowledge of all the cases submitted and the final selection has been determined, inter alia, on the basis of geography and a balanced coverage of the thematic domains. Apart from these, the main criterion was to elect the most interesting projects – not necessarily those that might have been considered the best projects.

The objective of capturing descriptions of these projects has, of course, been to try to exchange information and good practices. Too often across Europe, we repeat the mistakes already made by others before. By learning about the mistakes made by others, by knowing which are the blind alleys others already encountered, regions have the change to accelerate development, reducing development costs and associated risks.

While the task of capturing the project case reports has been far from easy, we hope nonetheless that this selection of 60 of them will be interesting and useful. We appreciate the efforts of those that compiled them. I wish also to thank Jane Tebbutt for her invaluable contribution.

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mobiles Automatisches Informationshilfe System

Mobile Automatic Information Support System (mAIS)

Schleswig-Holstein, Germany

Background Information

This was an eInclusion project aimed at improving access to electronic information for the physically disabled and elderly by presenting it in a form that they can access and make sense of. The project was aimed at people with mobility restrictions including blind and visually impaired people, deaf and hearing impaired people, those using wheelchairs and senior citizens. The budget was €531,466 of which 50% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds

What was the regional issue?

Information is presented via electronic displays in a very wide variety of locations, such as bus stops, railway stations, airports, and shopping centres. This can be difficult for the elderly and disabled to see, read or understand. In Germany, about 20% (16 million) of the population are either disabled or elderly. The aim of the project is to make electronic information available to all, thus providing equal access to information and involving the elderly and disabled in the information society. The region is a pilot project for state-wide implementation.

How did the project help?

The project designed and developed a system using the internet and state of the art communication technology. It was important to make the technology easy to use and cheap for the user. So the information was made available via an ordinary mobile phone fitted with software. The software allows it to receive data from a time schedule and translates this into a format that can be understood by the receiver - such as in large print or by voice.
Within the project there were 4 areas of activity:

- Specification and development of the necessary software
- Specification and development of the server
- Testing and validation of the product
- Publicising the project

The software allowed a mobile phone to receive information from a location beacon, built in or attached to the bus stop or other display which holds the relevant data - the times and frequency of buses for example. A bluetooth-interface allowed communication between the mobile phone and the location beacon. The software could be downloaded from the internet and installed on the mobile phone. Operating the software was kept simple using button and cursors or a touch screen. The system was flexible, allowing a large number of different profiles to be set up which then presented the data in the individually desired format.

The mAIS server formed the connection between the mobile phone and the information-providers' networks – for this project they are the local bus company's timetabling system and the local traffic control system. Communication was established via the internet in both directions. The main component of the mAIS-Servers was an intelligent databank, which stored all the data the mobile phone needs to be able to locate. Using the stored data, the server is then able to provide dynamic data from the traffic control. When combined, these give up to date information about the expected arrival of the buses at the bus stop.

In addition, the server provided information to the user whilst they were on the bus – informing them when they reach their stop, and giving directions to prominent places.

The product design, development and testing involved real people with age or disability-related transport problems. The field tests also involved the researchers, and lasted several weeks. This approach enabled the project to reflect accurately the needs of the target groups.

The project was publicised by a series of presentations to associations and advisory councils for disabled and/or elderly people as well as via newspaper and magazine articles.

Innovative aspects

The project has broken new ground in supporting people with restricted mobility to get about more easily with the help of ICT. It has brought together and involved mobile phone companies, the public transport sector, the disabled and elderly and regional and national government. The system can be tailored to the needs of individual users, and it can be scaled into other regions or countries.

What did the project achieve?

By developing a system that is customisable by the user the project has enabled disadvantaged groups participate in the Information Society in very practical ways which really make a difference to daily life. Users are able to get up to date and accurate information about bus services either at the bus stop or before they embark on their journey.

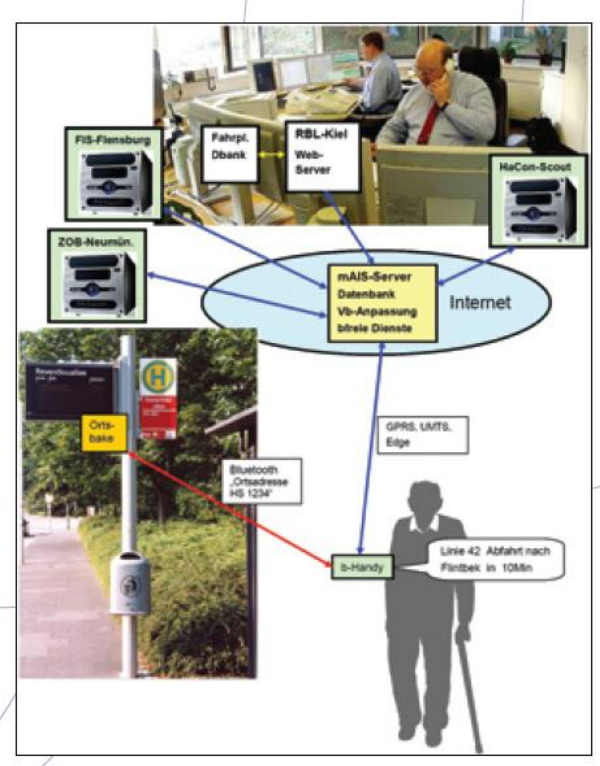
And what did it learn?

The project, by engaging the beneficiaries and the organisations providing the raw data, enabled the system to develop under real conditions which made the system robust. The project partners acquired an in depth knowledge and expertise in the field. This, alongside the level of cooperation of all involved, contributed to the project's success.

The project experienced difficulties in recruiting the disabled and elderly to participate in the field tests – because there was no previous experience for the beneficiaries to compare it to. This was overcome by providing detailed information to help them to understand the very tangible benefits that would accrue to them from participating in the trials.

And finally....what happened next?

There are plans to continue to develop the project with the present project partners and to prepare the product for production and market introduction - for which external financial support is needed. As soon as it is technically possible (i.e. when mobile phones carry GPS/GALILEO) and the financial support is available, the system will consider using GPS/GALILEO technology to improve the service.



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